



Eris Temple: New & Selected Poems 2007-2018
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OPERA BUFA (2007)

#1

Losing is the lugubriousness of Chopin. What's lost might be a sea shell or a tea cup or the bloody scalp of an Indian; it hardly matters. When you are lost, the heart recedes from exterior currents, too much in sync with itself, its groove vicissitudes. Each encounter, rather than revealing new rhythms, is experienced as a clangorous din, a pounding. The effect of this pounding is to push the heart deeper and deeper into pitiless darkness. The darkness is pitiless because it has no clear ending. The rhythms are pitiless because we do not know how they began. We find pity and it betrays us with a stray fondle. We squirm within ourselves to the sound of the Devil's opera bufa.

#7

If you were a yellow balloon in tall leaning trees, I'd be a girl in purple impaled between pillars. If you were a cup of finished ice cream, I'd be a brown-eyed moon-goddess. Is the human heart a Parisian kitchen? Are lamb-chops better than avarice? Are you churned like butter from Dantescan depths? Am I warm and willful as a shop-girl's thighs, stuck with grasses to a farmer's boots? Lunatics hover on branches, pushing me down into sleep; swans at the window, watching hail fall in diagonal darts. Your railings border me, yet toss my words up into gleaming squares. Priests look back and forth, veiny hands. Shadows strike the angels from their perch. Somewhere inside is a reference.

#13

O, for the strength to strip a stripper. Isn't that wanted by the forces swirling in eddies around the Delaware? Isn't that what becomes material? Not if you think one night can be micro, macro, all kinds of crows. Not if what you really want is to pick at my liver. Let's face it, you were never more than a soul-pygmy. You were a soul-gypsy by yourself, to yourself. We learn as life elongates that personal feelings about persons are not important. We learn that we are all pygmies. Your failure was in measuring yourself against ants, as if a beam and a magnifying glass could cure you. You should be so lucky.

#38

I was a cadaver in a copse until a cop arrested me. I was a convict in a jumpsuit until I jumped bail. I was a hitchhiker under galactic moon dust until I saw the sun. I was the sun as it rose and I shone on my dead self. I was a copse under the sun. I was a convict and a copse. I was all of this until I learned that you are what you see. I was what I saw until I saw that my eyes were shut. I opened my eyes to a kind of vacancy. I opened my arms to delinquency. I do not see anything now, and it rings.

#43

There was a girl on a hill. She was shrouded by a wash of shadow. In the background, a steeple peeked through blue. There were clotted sky-arteries. Light was moving on the hill and on the girl. She remained fixed. A sound like thunder made jarring waves. She was facing me. I was floating above a different hill. The picture before me was like a face. The girl knelt where a mouth should've been.

#50

You spent forty-seven poems looking for me, Maria says. You were talking in expansive, fluorescent, Crayola circles. All I can say is, I remember poundings and baseball cards and tons of bricks. I remember daftness and deftness disappearing. I remember gum, bruises, abusing ice cubes. I know that I had to dream an opera to really sing. I know I had to dream singing to really write. As for fluorescence, those crayons were always my favorites anyway. If the color is off, it's because my set collapsed, if not into nullity, then into plurality. I remember a city and a story. I am many stories up.

#56

Ms. Props, jealous, wants to know about Maria. She, too, wants a ton of bricks. A song pops into my head, just a germ, and I know that another opera is beginning, as night bleeds into dawn. *Never you mind*, I say, *you are as pain-worthy as she, as precious in your meddling, as diligent in your scavenger hunt*. I feel a C chord changing to E minor, then an A minor changing to G, and I realize what Eternal Return means. It means that every fresh breath of life plants seeds that must die. It means that the death of music is the birth of tragedy that must be expressed musically. It means all this fooling around must be paid for in the oven of creation. Every kiss must be minted.

#60

I can think of no afterthought. I can only say: *here I have been*. Music must bleed: let it. It will bleed into more and more of itself. It will spontaneously regenerate, nimble as an ice-walking fox in a blasted landscape. It will care for itself. I fall back like an exhausted lover, spent and famished. I am a cactus tree, full and hollow. I am one.

BEAMS (2007)

Solipsist

are you serious, fucking

bent over bars, malt heavens
bubbles bumping bed-posts, breakage

sweating mug, street-lake sea-shells
last night around yr waist

you're knotted, not what you did
pressed to the city's dry ice

deep down the throat of a solipsist

Loose Canon

shots ricocheted at borders

coated walls absorbed friction-lit brigades
sensitive machines registered red hits

sleep fell on specifics regardless
universals fried sausages

not much could be spoken of remorse

second skirmish sent forces scattering
shards of green glass littered forest floors

irreplaceable antiques wiped their eyes
on the cuffs of the loosest canon

I didn't expect immolation to arrive so soon

Whiskey

Balance, easily sought, is hardly attained;
no sooner are we aloft than we're

buried beneath snow-drifts; grace follows damn-
nation, damnation follows grace, & whiskey

soaked evenings are always a possibility.
In fact, it's here that Li Po forged

whatever stealth was his, in the first buzz
of drunkenness. I follow him, rattled, jarred,

& stymied by the world's cries, & my own,
& soon I sit amid piles on both sides—

exultations, horrors, amassed like so many
stamps, low-priced, out of date.

debbie jaffe

& that i must caesar. arms, curd
went down. found, mice, shelf, armor
machine. wasp it up, & up, & up, real
member a machine. then, head, shot,
“she said”, she said. feel, linger, can’t.
belly, caesar, belly. debit, giraffe, red-
headed. purge to null, urge, two, pull.
eye, belly, belie. ()

Becky Grace

It's woven into her, that polo
shirt. She might even fuck w/ it.
Not "we", post-we or sub-we, but
just "pseudo", "quasi", "ersatz".
Nothing w/ "self" in it; nothing
implying discrete boundaries.
Becky isn't bounded, or has
boundlessness woven into her...

Polo shirts are what they are,
remain so. If I say "objective
correlative", I bring string into it,
so that Becky might be
strung up. I don't deny a "literal"
element, or that Becky might stay in.
All I mean is, between "us", there's
"more-than-us". That's what I'm
"getting at"; it's woven into me

WHEN YOU BIT... (2008)

Big Black Car

Your middle: tongue
(hers), man (me), riding
together, I bitch (middle's
middle). I tongue man
you, her, spacious, it, of
you, all of us, can't feel
a nothing, I can't. Not
of this, of you, of her,
of all of this riding, in
what looks big, black,
has tongue-room. I
can't feel a thing. I feel
nothing of bigness, black
fur interior her you. Ride.

Back of a Car

Asinine, as is, this ass is:
ass I zip down into zero:
anal, a null, a void, this is.
I'm behind a behind that
sits smoking, rubbing, pink-
tipped, tender, butt, button.
She watches me watching as
I go brown-nose in another.
Only *her car-ness*, averted by
eyes to a wall, seems happy.
Only she can stomach rubs
of the kind that want plugs.
Sparked tank, here comes
no come, & aggravation.

Cocaine Gums

I ache: dull, sharp,
in a heap of paper.
All paper: picture,
bright, bold, dark.
I have nailed you
to a piece: black.
I darken touched
things: I'm used.
I write you, you,
you, as if kissed
by a fresh body,
rose-petal bliss.
I drowse: numb
as cocaine gums.

Framed

Nailed, two, across— I
have been glimpsing me
from above, as a camera
would, I am a still, this
is a film, this has to be
framed, no, don't hold,
I can't, it's an offstage
arm, both you & you
speak like I'm (so) not
here, I'm celluloid, I'm
varicose, vein-soft, fake-
bloody, cut, I can't move,
you & you & I minted,
taped, uncensored, dead.

Dark Lady

You're more of a Dark Lady
than I have ever hoped for,
especially because when you
betray me, it's with someone
I love: me.

You're more of
everything, actually, & you're
also a pain in the ass. That's
why I haven't let you off the
hook. I'll wind up in my own
hands again tonight, sans
metaphors, like your full
moon in my face, but you'll
never know there's a man in you.

Deodorant Redolence

Rage is senseless, I rage
in a cloud of senselessness
against the confines of a
first layer of rage against
the confines of a region
of loneliness buttressed
by a feeling that deodorant
is an insult against redolence
that I haven't guts to embrace.
I shower every morning, I
even bathe after I shower,
what this has to do with
anything is beyond me,
except that I like your dirt.

Stomach Flu

It's like, I have a virus
in my guts that forces
me to puke you up every
time I eat anything tasty.
I puke, shaking through.
I know what I need to do—
stop cigarettes & coffee &
booze & toffee & all things
that seem excremental
when lust for life has gone
rusty. Your increased bust
has made me allergic to
cherry flavored colas, syrups,
brandy, candy fits, & shit.

Screw

I want you to be like a bull.
I want you to call me a fool.
I want to be ass-proud for you.
I want you to call me to screw.
I know this iambic is dry.
I know this excess has to stop.
I know I can laughably cry.
I know blood can come drop by drop.
I come for you kicking my ass.
I've come to be making a pass.
I've come undistracted by "I".
I killed off my "P" as it's dry.
I start off these lines in the sand.
I want to end up in your hand.

CHIMES (2009)

#27

Our lives are conditioned by contingent factors, small and large, which shape and consolidate our perceptions. To make a long story short, how we perceive is conditioned heavily by what we have already perceived. Everyone's "spots of time" are peculiarly suited or unsuited to their own individual identity. I remembered something, when I encountered Wordsworth as an adult, that I knew would make sense to him as a tiny increment of time which made a large impression on my mind. The wooden cabin was rustic, realistically built, and cramped, especially to hold nine kids and two adults. Thus was formed the backbone of life at sleepaway camp. By the early morning hours, the two adult counselors had returned to their places and were also asleep. I awoke at maybe 2 in the morning one morning, from my position straight back and to the right, top bunk, to see a man standing stock still in the doorway of the cabin. The cabin's door was entirely open. There was nothing to light the man's face— his head was a well-outlined but nonetheless indistinct black blob. In the state I had of being half-asleep, I did not experience the impression of him, including black outlines, as a sinister one, but rather a vision of madness— of consciousness severed from reality, set adrift from the tactile in a land of amorphous shapes and sounds. The frozen man, swimming in the web of black shadows, was mad. Comforted, I fell back into complete sleep, which remained uninterrupted. The next day, I conveyed to others in the cabin what I had seen, but no one but me had been up for it. I was never able to solve the mystery of who the man was. Yet when I flash on the precise spot of time— a drowsy, half-asleep twelve-year-old at sleepaway camp sees, alone, something odd happen in the middle of the night— it is specifically about the odd things that people see, or the odd sights which are on offer among the human race when no one is, or seems to be, watching. The privacy of the vision— the contingency of the unlit face, seen indistinctly as a blob— more importantly, the mystery of whether the lunatic could notice from where he was standing that my eyes alone were, in fact, half-open— the perceived unpredictability of the lunatic's consciousness (why us? why this cabin?)— how preternaturally still he was— are all conflated with the sense that the vision is about all that happens in human life, hidden from view, which is most of it. We are forced to reckon an insubstantial surface most of the time. Beneath that surface, what is most real about the human race does its dance, which has much to do with madness, the middle of the night, and stillness intermixed with motion, as it did here.

The weekend nights we went ice skating at the Old York Road Ice Skating Rink, semi-adjacent to Elkins Park Square, also on Old York Road, weren't much for Ted and I: just something to do. Neither of us could ice skate that much. But there was a DJ playing good music over the PA, and taking requests, and a lot of Cheltenham kids hung out at the rink on weekends, so it was a chance to see and be seen. One uneventful ice skating night, I tumbled onto my ass as usual, and rose to see a girl, sitting in a clump of kids, on the bleachers, staring fixedly at me. My next pass, I got in a good look at her, and saw the spell was holding: she was still staring. She was a dirty blonde, thick-set build, with very full lips, a wide mouth, and wearing a dark green winter hat. I made up my mind: my next pass, I was going to stare as fixedly at her as she was at me. Ted was floating in the environs somewhere, and didn't know what was going on. So, here I came, looking at the girl in the green winter hat I'd never seen before, who seemed to want a piece of my action. I was close enough to make my presence known to her; we locked eyes; and what I saw in the delicate blue eyes was a sense of being startled, shocked into awareness somehow. Only, there was something so raw, so frank in them that I had to look away. My next, and final pass for the time being, the same thing happened. My eyes were startled, in an animal way, by how startled, how riveted her own eyes were, and I found myself unable to prolong contact. As Ted and I hung in the changing room, which had picnic tables and benches in it and doubled as a hang out space, I relayed to Ted, not without pride, what had happened. Ted was a reasonable, rather than a jealous type, but shy. So, the mysterious dirty blonde sat with her friends still, unmolested by us. Edward, our close acquaintance, a year older than us but kind, and conversant with almost everyone at the rink, was someone I could consult, so I did. I pointed her out, and he said, "Oh, that's Nicole. Do you know her?" "No, I was just curious. Thanks, Eddie." He chuckled, and left us alone, close acquaintanceship not guaranteeing me any more than that. I had wild hopes that Nicole would burst dramatically into the hang-out room with her friends, and perhaps propose marriage to me. When the gaggle of kids including Nicole, who had all been bleacher-hounding, left, they walked past us, down the steps and out. Nicole did not venture a final glance. For several months after that, I hoped Ted and I would see Nicole at the rink, but we did not. It was a lesson in the live-wire nature of desire, as it lives between people— how flames both begin to burn and are extinguished, out of nowhere, at the behest of forces no one really understands. Ted, that night, did his rounds, building a solid structure which would enable him to become a popular kid at CHS. I lit somebody on fire, but in such a way that all that could come from it was subsumed beneath implacable surfaces. Somewhere, I felt instinctively, was the key to the mystery I was looking for. Even if finding that key meant riding confusing, misleading, and/or agonizing waves.

#7

Our house on Mill Road was a two-story wooden twin painted sky blue, placed on a curving block on the bottom of a steep hill, and was itself on an incline. The wide backyard, where was a large wooden shed also painted sky blue, and which fed onto a gravel path and then down another incline into Tookany Creek, was set sharply lower than the front door and then Mill Road beyond it, while across the street shone the side face of another hill, on which began the houses on Harrison Avenue. The effect of this portion of Mill Road was seclusion, intimacy, and rusticity— it looked very much like a nineteenth, rather than a twentieth century innovation. The moon above Mill Road was secluded along with us, coaxed into a space privatized by immersion in a world apart from the rest of Elkins Park, Cheltenham Township, Philadelphia, and the wider world. That emotion, of being apart from things, was blended into harmony or moodiness, exultation or melancholy, by the song of the creek and its currents. Though my block eventually intersected with Church Road, where there was more worldliness, traffic, and a general sense of movement, what echoed in me on Mill Road was a way of being alone, of being private. I had no siblings. No surprise that the house was haunted by strange ghosts, strange ghosts and echoes. I awoke once covered in spiders and they were dancing and I couldn't get them off. Also a big round white light came into my second floor window, it shone there and dazzled me and screamed and my Father told me it was a police searchlight and I believed him but he was wrong. I can see the light today and what it was doing was charging me and I was being prepared to serve in a kind of army and I am serving in a kind of army now: the light knew. I screamed out of pained recognition when I saw it and that was a spirit that haunted the house. Other echoes shone off the surface of Tookany Creek, which soothed but was itself of another world that was faraway and deep and that I couldn't reach even when I waded in it.

#47

Winter stars twinkled above another Recreation Center in Elkins Park. I had walked out of the party, dejected, deflated by too many ups and downs, social snafus. N had seen me making a blatant pass at someone else. Yet N and I were by no means officially an item. N was swinging on the swing set; I joined her. I wanted to commiserate with her at how superficial the whole thing was— people wearing masks, playing roles, no one being real with anyone else. I wanted to recalibrate my entire consciousness around N, and the state of sacred union, of oneness, we often achieved. I was unaware that N had seen the pass being made, not botched but only half-accepted. And, to her, a betrayal, of the sense of oneness we had together when we did our phone benders. N was always betrayed by the physical. So, she swung, under the eerie yellow-orange outside lights, weak against all the encroaching darkness, the parking lot and the stars. I noticed: she wasn't answering me the right way. I said, "Don't you think this party is...?", and she cut in "no, I don't. I'm going back inside," leaving me to swing by myself. When I followed her in, in a few minutes, it was with the hollowed-out sense of having been broken, having seen oneness cut in half. There was the horror of it. The large, cavernous reception area led to several equally large, cavernous room spaces, empty, dark, and forbidding at this time of night, where I decided to spend a few minutes regrouping. Through an open door, I watched N make her usual party rounds. My date for the night was sequestered in one spot, and hadn't moved. I wanted to be somewhere else. Yet the demands of the evening required that I emerge and begin to do my own rounds. So, getting up my gets, I shut the door behind me (to all that wilderness) and walked straight over to the piano, where a bunch of random kids were huddled. The tunes I plonked out were simple ones, and I didn't sing along. I shyly approached my date and was evenly accepted. She had no heaviness for me the way N did, who would not speak to me for the rest of the night. But she liked her own body and the power it gave her. I myself should not, perhaps, have been a prisoner of the physical, but I was. I desired women physically in a way I could not hide. I wanted a shared oneness which was all-consuming. And my soul could only wish that there, under those stars, with light traffic rolling by on Old York Road, I could take N to the place where she might want what I wanted, and we could be all-consuming with each other, and nothing in us, physical or otherwise, could be anything but joined forever.

#33

I liked the festive aspect of celebrations, and the little adventures one could set loose at a party: running wild, smashing things, drinking forbidden alcohol. Driven by a delirious continuance, I put my hands all over girls' bodies. I prodded, pinched, teased, respectful yet prolonging the experience any way I could. My will dovetailed with a wonted continuance and I was precocious: jacket off, tie loosened, a little wolf. I learned how to ride a high and how to direct cohesive energy into a palpable magnetic force. At a festivity on the top of a Center City skyscraper in April '89, on an immense rectangular outdoor porch bordered by chest-high railings, I looked down to see, a great distance beneath me, an empty street, what I would later know as Sansom Street. I was talking to a momentary companion about my philosophy of life as not a game of chance but a game of daring. "Look," I told her, "watch." I took a wineglass I'd stolen while the adults in the indoor festivity area adjacent were not watching, and heaved it over the railing. She rolled her eyes, but, as I could not help but notice, I got away with it. Wherever the glass had crashed, and the resultant shards, were invisible to my eyes. Nothing happened. I wouldn't be henceforth carted off to reform school. I had been daring, riding on my luck, and I succeeded. Just as, at a birthday party at the Greenwood Grille, I snuck another wineglass out of the restaurant into the tunnel connecting one side of the Jenkintown Septa station to the other, and smashed it down in some kind of compactor unit. But on the top of the skyscraper, looking out over the baroque, well-balanced Philly sky-line, a seed had been planted which I hadn't noticed. What the city was, in contrast to the suburbs, was as invisible to me as the rogue glass-shards then. I was destined to learn that a spirit of adventure was one thing in the 'burbs, but could be pushed out and developed much further in the city, where crowds of interesting people could always mean interesting action. As we turned back into the main festivity area to shake off the April evening chill, I had a calm sense of being in tune with the cosmos. I picked up a spare Kahlua, and drank it.

#15

O, for American summers of ice cream, basketballs, hot dogs, softball fields. On three special weekends a summer, day camp became sleepaway camp, before I had been to sleepaway camp. We sat on picnic tables on Friday afternoons, after the rest of the camp had departed, waiting for the fun to begin, and our sleeping bags had been deposited in the Rec Hall. It was in the air then for me, and on the sunny Saturday mornings that followed: a sense of absolute, boundless freedom. Looking out over the fields, the archery range, the equipment shed, and back up to the rock path at the foot of the Rec Hall's steps, the day glistened inside and around us, a feast of gracious gifts. If we could inveigle a counselor to supervise, we could use the swimming pool, maybe (if he or she were mellow enough) for hours. The pool itself was up and around the corner from the Big Top pavilion, where the other counselors fired up tunes on their boom-boxes and gossiped about the night before, less ecstatic than us to be here in Norristown. Many times, I claimed the equipment shed as a personal fiefdom, so as to organize massive, junior-professional softball games. Everything was trundled out to one of the two fields which was separated only by a wire fence from narrow, curvy Yost Road, and more empty fields on the other side of it, which I often stared at, entranced at a young age by nature spirits without being consciously aware of it. Counselors played with us, including CITs (Counselors-in-Training), and the context required us to cut heads—if you weren't good enough, you couldn't play. Later, down all the fields I ran, shirt tucked into shorts, playing capture the flag. Or, there I sat at the campfire, being told scary stories, feeling the magic of a small clan huddled, marshmallow soft (as the smores we cooked) in that realm: *camp*. Eventually I discovered sex, my sex, through the knowledge of a little girl who saw a big man in me. She held my hand and kissed me, and it was a deep wave of knowledge that left forever aftershocks rattling my walls with fire and thrill, frisson. Those lips were tender, were fevered, were forever cleaved to me in my imagination after that one night outside the Dining Hall, which was suddenly far away as Neptune. There was a brooding and a bittersweet and a knowledge of what can be achieved when two poles of being meet in the middle to kindle sparks. I held on to it.

#21

For a long time there was no sound that was my sound. Then one night, I was at my father's house, which was not Old Farm Road. Glenside, this Glenside, was posh, luxuriant. On the radio I heard a sound that I knew instinctively was my sound. It was resonant, sharp, and had echo; it sent reverberations out to the four corners of the earth; it would not be denied. The music began with a short phrase, a riff, played on a hugely fuzzed electric guitar. The riff, allowed to reverberate and fill a large, studio-generated aural landscape, was a thunderbolt shot down from Olympus. It tugged, as baseball did, at everything in me which was masculine, courageous, outrageous even, daring. When a human voice was heard, filtered in, intoning a harsh reprieve to an errant muse (*You need coolin', baby I'm not foolin'*), it could be heard as vibrantly raw or merely shrill, singing in a very high register. My own consciousness perceived nothing but the vibrancy of power: extreme, uncompromising volatility and nerviness. The drums filled out an expansively drawn landscape with even more authority, as though a tribunal of Greek gods had converged and were sending secret messages to me in Glenside, ensconced with headphones while my father watched TV impassively across the room. When the guitar spoke for itself, above the fray and accented by space made for it, it was a form of blues made sophisticated beyond blues I was familiar with: all the agony and bravado of blues guitar pushed into a space where more eloquence was required, to achieve a necessary release past overwhelming tension. The cascades of notes were not just a release: they were a hint and a missive sent to me about the possibility of ecstasy on earth, achieved nirvana, release from karmic wheels. The aural landscape was rocky, mountainous, and allowed the listener to climb from peak to peak with it. In short, it was a place I'd never seen, a miraculous place, with landslides clanging over other landslides so that no stasis or silence need be tolerated. I had to merge with the landscape, join it, become it. I would not be able to sit still unless I became one with this sound, until I could similarly reverberate. I needed to reach the four corners, the mountain peaks, along with it. This sound that began with a loud guitar, played hotly, showed me the world seen through an auditory prism of light and shade.

#18

Subconsciously, I held fast to the axiomatic, self-schematic belief which forms the backbone of most highly intelligent people: you don't believe others, you believe yourself. This was necessary, as it would be later when I was ready to face the wider world: tensions were mounting. It was not unnoticed that I failed to react to the Harrison Avenue party as though it were an event for me. The group wavered in relation to me, picking me up and then dropping me again. I fell in love with one of them, Roberta, who symbolized my struggle with "cool." This was because for all her vaunted coolness, the iciness of her exclusivity, which manifested whenever she was forced to reckon anyone too socially lowly for her, an intelligent soulfulness shone out from her, and generated sparks. I could not help but recognize this intelligence, and see in it something and someone kindred. Sultry even at a young age, a lank-haired brunette, built sturdily enough to play serious tennis, I was warmed by what in her might be cultivated. The ice and the fire in Roberta's soul did furious battle, and I would always attempt to put in a good word: stick to the warmth, stick to the warmth. My success was intermittent, at best. Neither Roberta nor anyone else around her would admit that she had fallen for me too, but she had. I, myself, fought with my sense of knowing this. After all, and willy-nilly, I could never be, as was obvious at a certain point, really in. In meant fluency in projecting an ice-wall; it also meant contrived reactions and equally contrived posturing. The group itself had a self-schematic axiom: for those of us cool enough to be in, we sacrifice all else in our lives to stay cool enough to remain in. This, I was utterly unwilling to do. Did they find the sacrifice worth it? In any case I was a slave to Roberta's gaze, which went many ways, and was a burr in my side because she had no mercy. It was not to be. I was in love and it gave her an excuse to taunt which would relieve her pain, which was not an artist's pain and unacknowledged, and so taunts became the taut tensions of my everyday existence, and I bore up as best I could but I was only considered cool "in a way." Because I had not formed, I wanted what was outside of me; I needed my own help. I coveted Roberta's patina of blood and chocolate: that ooze.

#24

Now I had a sister who was half my sister, who was a baby and who I played with. My time was divided so that I was a brother half the time, when I was with my father and my other mother, who was not my mother. My life grew to have many compartments and I lost the cherished sense of continuity I had had, because things never continued. My life was splintered and I had more life than I should have had, and my world was an overcrowded subway car. All I could do (having chosen to be splintered) was ride the variegated waves as they broke around me, and my half-sister was a big wave and called me *Amio* and there was a big house they lived in that I was a visitor to and that was not precisely mine. All the same it was a big house and I had many friends that visited me at the house and there was a stimulating festive atmosphere that did continue for a while. The house was important— it taught me about luxury, what it meant to be pampered. My own, normal-sized, tan-carpeted bedroom was equipped with a black and white Panasonic television, of the kind no longer legal, too convenient, now. This meant that after a night out with my buddies, I could retire into bed, not to sleep, but to watch *Sprockets* and *Lothar of the Hill People* on *Saturday Night Live*. The gracious gift aspect of the TV being there also meant that on week nights, if I couldn't sleep, the TV would be there to keep me company, ease me into being restful. The den itself was equipped with a full-bar area— not relevant to me then, except as a place to sit when I would gab with, often, eventually, N on the phone, often for hours. It was a special space where my shenanigans with N couldn't disturb anything or anyone. Even if Dad was being predatory, the house was artfully spaced out and compositionally sound enough that I didn't have to be in the line of fire. He could pursue his rages and find other targets. Downstairs from the den, the finished basement was Den #2— a dartboard, a (by today's standards) primitive PC, with printer, and yet another spare bedroom hiding behind it. My friend, who was the beneficiary of this estate, once I at least owned shares of it and the shares were liquid, was Ted. We occupied the house— we rambled. The basement, Den #2, had a nice ambience to it at night. We used sleeping bags, burned incense, and listened to psychedelic music from the nineteen-sixties. If Dad was in the mood to pester, we had to tolerate. But he'd also bring us Philly-style steak sandwiches and fries from one of the better local delis, making up for his orneriness by offering up a Philly soul-food feast. Food he could handle. I was later to learn— the graciousness of the house, its sense of livability, of airy expansiveness, was typical of Glenside, over the rest of Cheltenham Township. Glenside liked, and still likes, to party. The larger houses, including Ted's, in other areas of Cheltenham like Elkins Park, had a sense of feeling dark, dingy, oppressive in comparison. Glenside could be spry. When it snowed, we took the sled right across the street to the Elementary School to ride the huge obstreperous slope it boasted— Easton Road was only a few blocks away. I was at the festive house two or three or four nights a week for several years. This, what was made of the custody battle. Otherwise, I was ensconced at Old Farm Road. And even as my father's presence, amid all the luxury, could only be an ominous one.

APPARITION POEMS (2010)

#1065

Black-shirted,
bright eyes in
dream-blues,
parents dead
of a car crash,
I kissed her so
long I felt as if
I would crash,
South Street
loud around
us, lips soft—

#1067

I want to last—
to be the last
of the last of
the last to be

taken by time,
but the thing
about time is
that it wants,

what it wants
is us, all of us
wane quickly
for all time's

ways, sans "I,"
what I wants—

#1327

She said, you want Sister
Lovers, you son of a bitch,
pouted on a beige couch in
Plastic City, I said, I want
Sister Lovers, but I'm not
a son of a bitch, and I can
prove it (I drooled slightly),
took it out and we made
such spectacular love that
the couch turned blue from
our intensity, but I had to
wear a mask because I'd
been warned that this girl
was, herself, a son of a bitch—

#1345

Two hedgerows with a little path
between— to walk in the path like
some do, as if no other viable route
exists, to make Gods of hedgerows
that make your life tiny, is a sin of
some significance in a world where
hedgerows can be approached from
any side— I said this to a man who
bore seeds to an open space, and he
nodded to someone else and whistled
an old waltz to himself in annoyance.

#1488

liquor store, linoleum
floor, wine she chose
 was always deep red,
 dark, bitter aftertaste,
 unlike her bare torso,
 which has in it
 all that ever was
 of drunkenness—
to miss someone terribly,
to both still be in love, as
she severs things because
 she thinks she must—
 exquisite torture, it's
 a different bare torso,
(my own) that's incarnadine—

#1511

steps up to my flat, on
which we sat, tongues
flailed like fins, on sea
of you, not me, but we
thought (or I thought)
there'd be reprieve in
between yours, for us
to combine, you were
terribly vicious, this is
our end (here, amidst
I and I), does she even
remember this, obscure
island, lost in Atlantis?

#1514

You can't
get it when
you want it,
but when I
want it I get
it; she rolled
over on her
belly, which
was very full,
and slept; its
just shadows
on the wall, I
thought, dark.

#1613

Follow Abraham up the hill:
to the extent that the hill is
constituted already by kinds
of knives, to what extent can
a man go up a hill, shepherd
a son to be sacrificed, to be
worthy before an almighty
power that may or may not
have had conscious intentions

where hills, knives, sons were
concerned, but how, as I watch
this, can I not feel that Abraham,
by braving knives, does not need
the one he holds in his rapt hands?

#555

Wood-floored bar on Rue St. Catharine—
you danced, I sat, soused as Herod,
sipped vodka tonic, endless bland
medley belting out of the jukebox—
you smiling, I occupied keeping you happy,
un-frazzled— suddenly sounds behind us,
the bar wasn't crowded & a patron
(rakish, whisker-flecked big mouth)
lifted a forefinger at beer-bellied
bartender bitching back, soon a real
fight, violence in quiet midnight,
I, scared, got you out of there

but you had to dance, you said,
had to dance so we paved Plateau, tense steps,
found nothing, you started crying & stamping
your feet like a child, I grabbed you & dragged
you back to our room you stripped, curled
into fetal position, beat your fists against
the mattress, in this way you danced
through the night, dozed & woke ready for more—

EQUATIONS (2011)

#1

Here's my equation: sex is more human than everything else. Let me put sex to the left of me and you to the right of me. In the interstices between me and sex, I have achieved my greatest consonance with humanity. In the interstices between me and you, I can (hopefully) give you a greater consonance with humanity, just by showing you the seams, the zippers, the ruffles, the cuffs, all the accoutrements that dress us up to be naked, in a text with its own nakedness. If I start with Marie, it is to show you her humanity so that you know why this was, for both of us, a fortunate fall. Marie had pale flesh. I am watching her; she is sitting on the little grass upwards-going slope behind the White Lodge, sipping a bottle of beer. Her straight, shoulder length black hair is parted in the middle. Then, a big open field with a peninsula of woods behind it; we're in the woods, making out. She wants to lie down amid the ferns, twigs, dirt, grass, and have it off. She's a teenager and I'm 22 and I'm freaked out, can't do it. So that I learn two kinds of hungriness can't always converge. Our bodies are slaves to different masters: duty, propriety to the right of us, impetuosity, passions to the left. When two hungers meet, they must negotiate. My hands go up her sleeveless, multi-colored blouse, but I'm going down the slope towards duty and right action.

#10

Heather is easily misinterpreted. She goes to bed with me for complex reasons: because she has pity for this underling artist, who tries so hard to be recognized; because this underling artist gives her treats (a public forum for her own underling art); because she finds him hard to resist after a few drinks; and because, lo and behold, she is genuinely aroused by what happens when these things are investigated. I don't have many interpretations of Heather; she's average height, average weight, a face more handsome than beguilingly pretty (sort of a WASP Frida Kahlo, heavy eyebrows, thick lips, dark hair that rides her head in waves). But what happens in bed is so climactic that it takes us beyond our self-serving interpretations. This is a woman who *gives*; every inch of her is covered in desire, which can (and must) be fulfilled. Heather likes sex more than any other woman I've slept with. She screams, bites, moans, and there is such a delicious fluidity to her movements that, despite her near-homeliness, I am moved to do the same thing. Heather is teaching me how rare it is to find a partner who loves these processes, who makes sex a manifestation of spiritual generosity. We're both almost thirty; I've never seen someone who contains both the generosity and the sense of comfort Heather has in the physical act.

#26

When I converse with N on the phone, in about my thirteenth year, our heads open up together, and we create an imaginative landscape out of nothing at all. Events around us, our classmates, notorious or boring or uproarious events of the days get used as fodder, parties, dances, and we hoist the whole rig up and sail it into the sky. We dance ourselves around our desire for each other: are we friends, or could we be more? When we broadcast together, other will sit and listen, spellbound. But to the left and to the right, even at thirteen, is the impulse to share our bodies as well as our souls and brains. N is conservative this way. She maintains a deep need to keep physicality light in and around her— she doesn't play sports, can't swim, is an excellent dancer but not a dab hand as a walker of city blocks, either. All her thoughts are of transcendentalizing past her own body, which is arrayed around her like marsh to wade through. The problem is a hold she wants to maintain over my emotions. We act, often, like newlyweds, but because she will not submit to me physically in any way, my emotions, unconsciously set at a skeptical angle, cannot cleave to her finally, like a ship docking in at a port. Sexual devotion often starts, I learn later, with the body, the physical mechanism. Our bodies are the primordial fact of who, and what we are. So, we talk on the phone for hours, imaginative leap follows imaginative leap, but imaginative leaps are not a basis for a man's devotion. Not that I'm aware of this at thirteen. All I know is that our brains are doing something intense together, and I like the feeling, but my soul craves a reality somewhere between us that cuts deeper, from sharper, starker angles, into a sense of achievement, conquest, victory, a permanent sense of marking and being marked. Later, it is Trish who brings all these algorithms together. She knows only too well what I am, and what I want. We imaginatively leap all over the cosmos together, hand in hand or separately, but the climax, the final imposition of the most profound shared imagination into the most profound imaginative leap, is back into our bodies and, when we are good together, out again, out into a re-entry of the cosmos, as a finality.

#27

Audrey, as a tangent to N, took the idea, not of broadcasting gossip but of sharing and disseminating literature, as a *fait accompli* move to establish romance, drama, suspense, and rich entanglement in her life. Prisoner of a rich background, and with a preacher for a father, she latched onto me as a purveyor of sweets for her, from my books to my looks to a sense of deference she wanted me to sometimes have as a way of demonstrating respect for her roots. The one determinative moment—we stood, with a crowd of poets, outside a bar in Andersonville, Chicago, as a night of festivities ended, and I was either going to pick her up somehow or not—ended in, for me, a practical response of denial. Her apartment was in an obscure neighborhood in Chicago, I was staying in the distant 'burb Palatine, and was due in Rockford the next afternoon. For Audrey, as she was later candid about, I was resisting something compelling in the universe which required that we spend the night together. She was heartbroken, with her Indiana-bred sense of being cornfed (blonde, voluptuous, clear complexion), and with the conviction she had that anything she wanted could always be hers. Rich equations suffer greatly from senses of entitlement, emanating from the rich, and dousing all that they touch with a glaze of non-recognition, of obliviousness. This was Audrey's contradiction—give her a text, available to be read at her leisure, incapable of vocalizing need or difference of any kind, and she could rise to the occasion brilliantly. Texts had a way of ejaculating into her brain and heart tissue, in a lovemaking routine (with the right text at the right time) extremely pleasurable for her. As I stood with her outside Moody's Pub, a flesh and blood entity—needy, morose, possibly surprising or disobedient the wrong way—turned her interest tempered with diffidence. This decided the night for us. Had we been ensconced together for several days, as I had been with Wendy, things might have been different. But when two possible lovers are too transient to each other, the magic spells don't work, incantations fall flat, and it is learned again that for equations to take on flesh in the world, there is no substitute for real, raw time.

#37

Bars work into sex equations; so does travel. When Wendy and I hook up in New England, we manifest not only guts and bravado, but glamor. We are transients there, doing what transients do. What I make with Kyra, who shares a large flat in the East Village with one of her also-fashionista friends, is even more gruesomely constructed. Kyra is John's sister. John and I are running the Philly Free School together. When we stop off to spend the day with Kyra in Manhattan, and then the night, I know instantly that (as is gruesome to admit I could be this crass) I can make a score here. Kyra is drastically, dramatically about charm, glamor, and intrigue. The raven-haired, buxom look she favors is pure Liz Taylor, skin slightly bronzed more than Liz, and, most importantly, a physiology which does not say (as most physiologies do) no instantly. All her postures, jests, glances suggest there is room in her. Yet with John to think of (this is his sister), the transient sucker punch into bed would depend on me being (as Wendy had been to her benefactors in New Hampshire) more brutish than usual. Decentered away from our personal norm, against a novel backdrop, in the middle of a period of expansion and growth, why shouldn't I be brutish? Now's the time. At a bar not far from her flat, John and I hold court. Here is Samantha, a friend of mine from the old Manhattan days. We flirt outrageously, too. I've got a girl on either side of me on an elegant sofa (Manhattan, more than Philly, favors sofas in bars). John is bemused. Punch-drunk on all the attention, I understand that Samantha lives too far away, in the recesses of Brooklyn. Tonight it must be Kyra, or no one. John is also high as a kite and more tolerant than most. When the three of us tumble drunkenly back into Kyra's apartment, the crunch comes. I'm either going to make a play to sequester myself in Kyra's room with Kyra or be more civil with John, and less pushy generally. Fortunately or unfortunately (and channeling, perhaps, Baudelaire's Good Devil), I feel the game within me, and have just the right concoction running through my veins to see it through to the end. A bar is a game; travel is a game, often, too; and when game-stakes are raised, you either rise to the occasion or you don't. The door is eventually shut on John, who can't not laugh (welcome to P.F.S., right?), and I am alone with Kyra. The night is hot, her room not air conditioned. We don't talk much. I find myself riding the game, pushing the river, and what happens is not masterful or revelatory, but adequate. The fashionista appurtenance items (mostly clothes to be debuted, turned in to authorities, or discarded), sounds of the East Village beneath us, even Marlboro Reds to smoke (not my usual brand), all coalesce into a sense that having started on one square on a game board (that's bar-talk), I've done a game version of a check-mate. I've been a Zen arrow into space the right way. Even as I am not unaware that deeper questions and resonances are being unanswered, and John has real reason to be annoyed. For the night, I am Kyra's appurtenance item and she mine. This inverts who I am with Trish and Jena, but once the action's over and Kyra's asleep, there's no way out. The equation is: you did it, and that's it.

#38

That first spring I spent in State College, Hope swept hopelessly away from my friends and I as a siren. With her pitch black hair, dark eye make-up, Cure shirts, she embodied the mystery of the Gothic, which was a countercultural subtext in the Nineties about outsider-ism, what it meant to subsist as a freak in the world. I didn't know what she would be like up close— as of August, and the fall semester starting, the dimensional angle hit me as hard as Hope did, who was not taking no for an answer, with any of us. The attitude, once you gained access to her room, was as pure Don Juana as it could be. When she, frankly, pulled off her panties and offered me her crotch, the heat of it made me swoon, so that I could only half-function. She was too bold, too blunt. All of her was fiercely dark, and the fade into her was to cleave to the darkness. Yet, the tactile thing, about lovemaking and sex and the right kinds of delicacy and the right blend or savior faire towards mixing seductiveness, aggression, and restraint, was beyond her. Hope wanted sex to manifest as a Gothic ideal, a stand taken for burrowing into each other's permanent, corrosive darkness. What two bodies are actually supposed to do to make sex a something pleasurable, was not a relevant reality, when all that black eyeliner spoke more. All of which meant that sex here fell down, past her sharp jaw-line, bulging eyes, and exotically wrought face, into a way of demonstrating rebellion, obstinacy against the normative, but also awkwardness between two bodies hardening and softening in and out of harmony with each other, with their own nudity, and with an attitude too militant, too fierce. I learned that, movies and other cultural talisman objects aside, real sex requires real tenderness, for men as well as women, and when tenderness goes missing, so, generally, does ecstasy.

#43

I learn from Trish the rules of intoxication. As you lift off, you leave behind everything in your consciousness that is tinged towards the mundane. Normal space/time dimensions need not apply; everything happens in a realm of perfected imbalance, expected surprise. Trish has lived with drug dealers; has spent years in circumstances extreme enough that ingesting hard chemicals becomes like brushing one's teeth. Trish does, in fact, find states of intoxication cleaner than sobriety. A sober mind dwells on hard facts; hard facts for Trish have no endurance. Trish wants every lover to be Lord Byron; every night to contain and perpetuate Greek-level dramas; and to be a heroine in such a world grants a crown of flame, of radiance, that Trish covets. But dramas demand conflicts; I learn that Trish will rock the boat for no other reason than this. There's always a solution sweet; but Trish enjoys the solution less than the problem. She wants to see me riled; there's always an impressive array of red flags at her disposal. When she does her seven-veiled dances, she can use her various highs to create a palpable ethereality. I never have any choice (once the drama has been set in motion) but to resolve the tension with a push into her, and a denouement involving another bowl, drink, pill. Consummate sensuality can have no reasonable end; it has to be pushed to its limits to be really tasted. This equation threatens to overtake my existence. They are a distraction from a shrewish reality— that the greatest escapists invariably have the most onerous obstacles and daunting responsibilities to escape from.

#48

Jena has very specific, very naïve notions about love. Love is faith— you believe in someone else. But Jena’s version of love presupposes a static sense of self, and an equally static sense of the Other. If you change, you must not change profoundly— there must be a continuous, coherent presence that subsists from one change to another. The conflict is that most mutual upwards movements change things (consciousness, emotional matter) irreparably. As soon as it becomes clear that this is what Jena’s vision is (once the initial thrill of perpetual physical intercourse has subsided), I realize that nothing between us can coalesce. She barbs her remarks in such a way as to suggest that I’m not who she believed me to be— a simple, unchanging soul. As things burn down to the wire, I realize that Jena’s ideals dictate that no one will ever exist for her except as a shadow of these ideals. She will project her ideals onto many, and see who mostly closely conforms to their striations. When I read through her letters many years later, I am stunned that I could’ve fooled her for as long as I did. But there’s not much room for reality in human relationships and by the time I reread these letters, I have my own formulated ideals. What redeems me, in my own estimation, is the facticity of my awareness— that the idea of an actualized human ideal is fallacious, and that honest consonance on this level has its own way of going up.

#53

I walk around my apartment, bottoming out. I'm not hungry enough to eat, too tired to sleep. Because right now I'm seeing *through* things, I know that Jade's entry into my life isn't such a big deal. She actively courts states of impermanence; everything she does is calculated not to last. All her relationships are posited along an axis of attraction/repulsion. But I have inherited enough of her hollowness that right now it doesn't matter. I gaze out the window at the SEPTA trains, wires, 30th Street Station off in the distance; I remember the eternal charm of action, movement, dynamism. When you get in a train, you transcend an entire life you leave behind. Yet every human life has to balance stasis and movement. It's something Trish never mastered— how to move and not move simultaneously. Trish demands absolutes— absolute movements, absolute stillness. I have learned that the only absolute in the universe is existence itself— something will always exist. I don't pretend to know how, or what, or why. I've left all the shot-glasses out; Jade forgot her cigarettes, American Spirits. I fish one out of her pack and light it.

I have the challenge set out before me: to accept my own hollowness, as I watch Jade perform her daily tasks. There is a sense that I am watching a series of multiplications: first Jade is *this* person, then *that* person. All of this signifies that Jade sees my own multiplications when we touch. But if there is no stable center inhering in either of us, who are the two people that fuse their physical energies, in such a way that the world is briefly effaced? Multiplications can be taken two ways— as a destruction of stable centers, or the creation of variegated parts that form coherent wholes. Because Jade needs her drugs more than I do, I feel her desperate edge of a woman hovering above an abyss, a woman who cannot look down. I'm past the point of believing in myself as savior or personal Jesus; Jade must live with her crosses and bang through them on her own. My own cross is the vision of multiplications ending, simply because each ephemeral self expresses the same desires, tastes, fixations, and foibles. Jade and I can't give each other that much— Trish could never teach me this, because our basic, shared presumption was that nothing existed but what we could give each other. As I make love to Jade, there is a charity I feel towards her predicated on her own unacknowledged autonomy— that she has more than she thinks she has. If we persist without knowing yet what our equation is, I know that much of it has to do with shared charity, expressed in a context of basic and final separation and singularity.

#61

The crux of the matter is this: it's time for me to jump into some fray again. I'm restless: I know that what you gain in solitude has to be pushed out into the open for there to be some truth consonance, and these peregrinations are not enough. Jade has been bolstering my confidence; but I'm too old to just hit the bars and the clubs like I used to. So I'm poised to do something, I just don't know what yet. Like mathematics, human life has distinct compensations: there is always another equation to be formulated and parsed, a new slant, novel ways of perceiving realities that are leveled and layered to begin with. And, somewhere in the distance, a miracle always hovers: the promise of a few truly lived moments, in which every narcissistic schema is transcended in the sense that something is being given and received on both sides. If I didn't believe this, there would be no reason not to commit suicide, because I already feel I've done enough work for one life-time, and the growth of my seeds has been more than adequate. But because the deepest truths are social, it cannot be my life-path to give up on my own humanity, and everyone else's. I have claimed that these miracles usually transpire in a sexual context, but I have learned in writing this book that this does not have to be the case. Our greatest consonance with reality and humanity is expressed any time something moves in an upwards direction between ourselves and someone else; any equation involving legitimate ascension is one worth investigating.

CHELTENHAM (2012)

#261

Never one to cut corners about cutting corners, you spun the Subaru into a rough U-turn right in the middle of Old York Road at midnight, scaring the shit out of this self-declared “artist.” The issue, as ever, was nothing particular to celebrate. We could only connect nothing with nothing in our private suburban waste land. Here’s where the fun starts— I got out, motherfucker. I made it. I say “I,” and it works. But Old York Road at midnight is still what it is. I still have to live there the same way you do.

#412

Each thinks the other a lonesome reprobate.
That's what I guess when I see the picture.
It's Elkins Park Square on a cold spring night;
they're almost sitting on their hands. One
went up, as they say, one went down, but
you'll never hear a word of this is Cheltenham.
They can't gloat anymore, so they make an
art of obfuscation. That's why I seldom go
back. Elkins Park Square is scary at night.
There are ghosts by the ice skating rink.

#414

And out of this nexus, O sacred
scribe, came absolutely no one.
I don't know what you expected
to find here. This warm, safe,
comforting suburb has a smother
button by which souls are unraveled.
Who would know better than you?
Even if you're only in the back of
your mind asphyxiating. He looked
out the window— cars dashed by
on Limekiln Pike. What is it, he said,
are you dead or do you think you're Shakespeare?

I.

The Junior Prom deposited me (and fifteen others) on the floor of her basement. I could barely see daylight at the time, and at three in the morning I began to prow. I was too scared to turn on any lights. She emerged like a mermaid from seaweed. I needed comfort, she enjoyed my need. We had gone out— she was bitter. The whole dialogue happened in shadows. No one was hooking up in the other room, either. You spiteful little princess.

II.

Whether off the bathroom counter
or the back of your hand, darling,
your unusual vehemence that
winter night, cob-webbed by
half-real figures, was animated by an
unfair advantage, which stooges threw
at you to keep you loopy as you
died piece-meal. All I had
was incomprehensible fury and a
broken heart— when I hit the floor
at four, you were getting ready
to play fire-starter, opened
the little snifter, curled your finger
twice in the right direction; darkness—

Addendum: #420

The craftier angle to hear them: hover
in the doorway, in total darkness, hands
held behind your back. She takes a stand
against him in the shadows, as her lover
flails, barefoot on carpeting: jabs, another—

these two miserable adolescents, tokens
of the dirge that was this tepid Philly 'burb,
clown choruses pining for images, curbed
words replaced with scripts, minds unbroken
finally meeting ends in winter rain, soaking,

drenched with venom against the Solid.
What to look for: register his life-force
energies against hers, for the first course
her rhetoric takes against him, her stolid
defiance, sharply defined, against knowledge

that she's veered over into eerie wilderness.
It's true, the abyss laughs around her, & him,
but she's slightly more bound up in it, thinned,
bruised beneath surfaces to embrace the abyss,
all he needs is a caress given really, a kiss—

he won't get it. What he'll get is the meaning
of the surface she's chosen: bone, dust, webs.
Yet they stand exalted as they taste the dregs—
someone's watching elsewhere, & scheming.
Transmutation must happen, past dreaming—

that spirit, against the animal, is real in them.
The doorway is hinged to show you two souls—
unvarnished, electric, whether riddled with holes
or not, & love of a kind is being made, & gems.
The craftiest angle is not you, if you will, but them—

I.

“Fuck art let’s dance”
only we didn’t dance,
we fucked, and when
we fucked, it was like

dancing, and dancing
was like art, because
the climax was warm,
left us wanting more—

how can I know this
dancer from the dance?
Brain-brightening glance,
how tight the dance

was, and the sense that
pure peace forever was
where it had to end for
both of us, only your

version was me dead,
after I had permanently
died inside you like the
male spider always does—

II.

Pull me towards you—
woven color patterns
create waves beneath
us, tears buoy bodies

to a state beyond “one”
into meshed silk webs—
not every pull is gravitational—
as two spiders float upwards,

I say to you (as we multiply
beyond ourselves) “those
two are a bit much, their
sixteen legs making love”

#524

When he drives around Elkins Park in
the dead of night, he thinks, this is how
I like the human race— asleep. When three roads
fork at Myers, he goes down Mill Road.
By the time the car climbs Harrison Ave,
he has the thought that the sleeping human
race is the holy one. He pushes past the old
derelict high school on High School Rd, wonders
if its still haunted. It flashes on him: the day
he broke in, smack in the middle of the Nineties,
with buddies now long dead. He found a hammer,
stole it, never used it— it sat in his closet
until after graduation. He was smashed then, too.

#281

A small unframed painting
of a many-armed Bodhisattva
hangs over the bed where
you imagine us wrapped, rapt
I do not deny this rapture
I make no enlightened claims
I have no raft to float you
Hard as it is for you to
believe, no mastery came to
me when this thing happened
I have two arms, no more
I am only marginally sentient
I cannot save you or her
The painting is better than us
you're welcome to it

#158

A piece of road kill on the New Jersey Turnpike, scuttling into the city to steal from the old West Philly co-op, to cook lentils over a fire in woods somewhere near the Pine Barrens, this woman who deserted me for a man who could and has brought her three things: no children, abject poverty, and sterling marijuana. It's to be smoked as no last resort but as a means of being so wired into walking deadness that living out of an old Seleca seems celestial as a canto of Byron's, perhaps the one she used to recite to me— "tis' but a worthless world to win or lose," and believe me, baby, you don't know the half of it, but you're not listening, you're stoned, you always were, oh the charm of you.

THE POSIT TRILOGY (2017)

Posit

I want
but that's
nothing new.

I posit
no boundary
between us.

I say you,
I know you,
I think so.

I know
what world
is worldly.

I know
how death
stays alive.

I never
enter third
person places.

I could
go on
forever.

To Bill Allegranza, after reading *In the Weaver's Valley*

"I" must climb up
from a whirlpool
swirling down,
but sans belief
in signification.

"I" must say I
w/out knowing
how or why
this can happen
in language.

"I" must believe
in my own
existence,
droplets stopping
my mouth—

alone, derelict,
"I" must come back,
again, again,
'til this emptiness
is known, & shown.

Le Chat Noir

I pressed a frozen face
forward into an alley off
of Cedar St., herb blowing
bubbles (am I too high?) in

melting head I walked &
it was freezing & I walked
freezing into pitch (where's
the) blackness around a

cat leapt out & I almost
collapsed a black cat I
was panting & I almost
collapsed I swear from

the cold but look a cat
a black cat *le chat noir* oh no

Dracula's Bride

I married into blood &
broken necks, endless
anemic privation, but

no regret. You see,
hunger fills me. I like
vampire hours (no

sleep), a blood-vessel
pay-check, diabolical
companionship, tag-team

seductions, guileless
maidens about to
be drunk.

We know what sweetness
is in starvation. We've
found, satiety

is death's approval stamp.
If you crave, there is
room left in you. If

you want, you are a
work-in-progress—
being finished is

a cadaver's province.
Better to suck
whatever comes.

Manayunk Sky

Facades on Main Street have a lift
towards it, but the Manayunk sky
isn't there, a mirage, a conglomeration

of spent wishes for a better human future
which can never be lived in the blackened
glare of well-trodden pavement. Its

expanse argues loudly for the subaltern
and its accessibility, a superior up
is down, a superior blue is black,

a superior open is packed tight
into a closed linearity, night's deep
recess. Now, I take the trouble

to interrogate pavement, which
can only deny truths of not-surface, hotly.

To Augustine, after reading his “Confessions”

If you really did find
something or someone
immutable, freed from
torturous progress, I
can't say I don't believe—

If you came to rest
apart from the unworkable
aligned profoundly with
profundity's alignment,
congrats from a still point—

If I seem cynical,
catching your desperation
as tides confounded you,
I at least know your death,
its heft, text, all plumbed

by me, or someone else.

Absinthe

Situations which, to face properly, you
might want to experience a floating
sensation (as though you'd hit the ceiling)—

they've closed the Eris Temple on 52nd
and Cedar; if there were (as has been
suggested) corpses beneath the floor-

boards I didn't see them, nor did I notice
the imposed regime change five years ago
and, yes, I would've cared, but then I

remember, this is Philly, heavy on inversions
and abasements, situations you can and
cannot float over, and the syrup poured

over your efforts takes back what it gives,
towards justice, balance, deathly intoxication—

Tranny Dream

I find myself in bed with a woman
with a man's crotch, & find this
unacceptable, & so excuse myself
into an autumn evening in North
Philadelphia, looking for a train
station, finding more nudie bars.

I get trapped in an enclosed space
with a stripper, done with her work
for the night, who counsels me
against taking the train home, that
I can sleep with her backstage at
her bar. I push past, into the night
again, & am assailed on all sides.

Eris Temple

That night I got raped by a brunette
chanteuse, I lay on the linoleum floor
of the front room sans blanket, & thought

I could hack it among the raw subalterns
of the Eris Temple, who could never
include me in their ranks, owing to my

posh education; outside, on Cedar Street,
October gave a last breath of heat before
the homeless had to hit rock bottom again, &

as Natalie lay next to me I calculated
my chances of surviving at the dive bar
directly across from the Temple for the

length of a Jack & Coke, North Philly
concrete mixed into it like so many notes—

Dracula on Literature

You can't tell me
you don't feed on
the mysterious disappearance

of the need to do this—
that raw life & blood
would suffice to

satisfy, & gird you
against the grinding
towards sphere-music

you fancy you make.
I've lived a thousand
years among human

souls, all in need of
blood, little else, and
words are no blood

at all— what suffices
for such as you is
(as you say) a

simulacrum of blood,
with limited flow-
potential, & as such

I counsel you (if
you ask) to feed on
something more wholesome—

don't scoff— wholesome
is not relative
for the human species,

& your words are dirt,
feeding no one directly,
& those who feed are

suspect, chilled by
exposure to terminal
frosts, unable to bite

what might suffice in the end...

NEW POEMS (2017/18)

Architecture and Levitation

The subliminal nature of architecture—
demonstrating, for the human brain, what
space is, how it might be saturated, without always
obtruding upon our consciousness— as I
drove around King of Prussia on those
brooding semester breaks, a subtle sense of
enchantment grew, hinged to what my
future might hold, as one who writes. King
of Prussia Mall, Tower Records, random
commercial strips with record stores, restaurants,
even the bus station where I was claimed
at the inception of the break, were all planned &
executed to manifest a sense of levitation,
& left my brain somewhere in the world Other, forever—

Recondite

It seemed not recondite at the time,
on that much acid, in the dead of
night, in an icy winter, with perhaps
a foot of snow on the ground, to
find one's self in a van in a parking
lot in State College, with your friend's
sister, as ska bands blurted out their
numbers in the adjacent ballroom;
it seemed natural. I drifted into her,
pushed, pulled, someone cackled from
outside the van, I woke still in the van
with her in my arms before daybreak.
On the trudge back, through snow & ice,
to North Halls, I saw God through a grate.

Perfect

The poster of Monroe, dousing herself in cologne, was you, yourself, again— had to be perfect, as you said; as Jennifer was you, yourself again, perfectly, as didn't need to be said, couldn't have been anyway, then. I imagine you, wandering down to that dank basement, with a sense of symmetry in your brain about what had been, would be. By the time it was time, your hair had darkened, but the core of you remained bright, as bright as it had been in the house on South Atherton Street. It was your turn to cut down the middle, offer up your vision of perfection to a man who appeared to you more than a curiosity— sharper.

The shock of making love amid a sea of paper, piles upon piles— my own vision of perfection had arrived, on the wings of the Symbolists, as they were me, myself, again, etc. The space we were able to inhabit that autumn, a from-here armistice season against Hell, couldn't last, but we didn't need it to. Rather, if we cut into each other at the right angles, a fossil shell imprint would be left on State College, & the whole world; pungent, starkly ravishing enough to last our own un-warped version of forever. So it has been for me. As to where & what you cut down the middle of, as we speak— we'll see if I'm pure enough to know anymore, Emily. Maybe.

Voodoo

From my second-floor sublet on
West Nittany Avenue, I'm sure you
looked out at autumn State College with
a mystical sense that your spell was being
cast: hydrochloride pot, cigarettes,
the rest that was you, splayed out in
a posture that, somewhere, you had
already mastered; the spell was against
all the run-in-circles crew, "sororisluts,"
footballers, frat-packs, the anti-human,
anti-humane; what sutured our skin
together ripped them to shreds, in
your mind, as it was cast out (black
mattress); using voodoo I missed, bewitched.

Riot Grrrl

Prize partridge around Media, Mary was also a bad
seed or rebel par excellence. She doped & fucked her
way in divergent directions; got dropped into hospitals;
rode with her assumed husband on a motorbike;
in the parlance of the times, granting complete credulity
to her tales, a wilder riot grrrl never drew breath.
What mattered to me was whether I had her or not.
This remained variable, as Abby also appeared, & both
of us caught viable action on the side. One night
she arrived by cab to Logan Square, in frilly dress,
hair in a bun. I grabbed her & fucked her on the floor,
& that (somehow) was it— marriage consummated. Even if Mary
never really got tired of moaning about my drug
shortages— Klonopins, Ritalin. Couldn't love be enough?

Genius Loci

You'd never find her talking much, Diana, or outlining aesthetic principles, or any principles at all— yet you couldn't call her decorative, or anything pejorative— more than anything, she was one more adjunct to a housemate, who could be holding at any time, so be nice, because you never know, we might (you know) need her help some time— one night, deep into the wee hours, & as the entire house tripped (taken off, it seemed, into distant universes, sucked into black holes, or even flipped the switch into primordial ooze & chaos), I swung dumbly into Kevin's room, found Diana tripping

on the bed, in tee & panties. As I sat down on the bed, all that occurred to me was to follow my instincts. The genius loci of that place & time was all about nothing else, & the sense that Diana, whose elegant lashes & sculpted cheekbones belied her wildness, existed as an archetype I came to worship at the shrine of, even as music roared from the room next door, Mary & Abby slept on the other side. I was so high, I have a hard time remembering what happened, yet I'm guessing we didn't talk much, & as to the what else... who knows? That was Diana: who knows? Empty spaces, infinite possibilities, speechlessness.

Crowned

The routine social maintenance of our domain— another drunken night at McGlinchey's, eyes & ears to the ground as usual, broken then only by your arrival. It must've been Nick who met you first, I don't remember, but I saw you were fixated on him. Hannah: novelist, politico, of course, but looks which teetered ambiguously into divisiveness for those who knew you— heavy brows, wavy hair, tall, a bit tomboyish, also, but articulate, a charmer, & yet I registered the sense that if I ever got you, it would be something gratuitous, a surprise, because closed seemed to be the fortress, & choosing Nick seemed to betray a masochistic streak. That night, his front swelled visibly with your arrival— I stepped back.

You were, must've been, I later realized, underwater somehow, surveying currents, examining the wildlife, surreptitiously & invisibly carving a watery path to me. I had only what the male of the species always has— the equipment to complete your circuitry, potent or impotent in any time or context, waiting latent to take our moment, make it crescendo through the reef, weed, rock, as though destined, written into ocean's records an eternity ago, when all life dwelt in the ocean, all encounters occurred in resplendent semi-darkness. And all this still sitting with the gang at the Glinch, holding your own with a bunch of macho punks, who were taking something in Philadelphia by force, me selected silently, the tomboy an Ocean Queen, crowned—

Undulant

I'd made plans to meet you in Bar Noir
on 18th; you were there; we drank. What
happened after that, in the Logan Square
flat, is that in defrocking you knocked over
an antique lamp bequeathed to me by my
aunt in Mahopac. Serendipity, I thought,
stunned then into silence by your bedroom
élan. Outside, a sultry night simmered; this
night of all nights, scattered green glass littered
my bedroom floor, & I finally got taken, past
liquor, to what eternity was only in your mouth—
as though you'd jumped from a forest scene
(ferns, redwoods), a world of pagan magic,
into a scene still undulant with possibilities—

To Jon Anderson

I have to laugh, Jon, to remember how
the moon hung over the open field
behind the river, where we all sat, smoking
your spliffs, reciting poems, and, for me,
checking in with the Philly squad to see
if everything remained in place. What's
funny is that what we never found out
remains the most important thing— how
far would or did they follow you, after
the party was over; what more could you
make them do? Hypnotized into place,
set in staunch motion by bells ringing all
over the goddamned place, what gave?
The wildness of lying in the New England

grass, deep into the night, seemed to tell me
we'd never find out. What you would do
with your tribe would be your secret, ribald
or righteous, just as I'd retreat invisibly
from this crew back to Center City, Becky
back to her brahmins, Talia back to Rhode
Island, God knows where, & the rest.
What we meant there that night was funny,
kiddies let loose to party all night, yet
kicked in the ass by fate to acknowledge
that when a group creates a frequency in
the universe, it can linger in space for
a long time, humming its tune, smoking
its dope, carrying the river, making it earth.

Butler Pike

The entropy, enervation of a recession—
consciousness rots, abraded by the obtrusiveness
of a dull, jagged populace— I stroll down
Butler Pike, snapping pictures of the houses,
& the buildings penetrate into my brain,
more than the people. Architecture is its
own phenomenological explosion, occupying
space inside/outside the mind, standing in now,
for better or for worse, for the people who
could occupy similar space— what I notice,
as sentience emanating from the buildings,
is that architecture is how the human race
expresses its relationship to nature. Here,
our choice is a sturdy yet ethereal harmony,

formidable, eerie, which foresees who might
occupy the houses, & yet chooses to manifest
the ornate over the plebeian, or merely practical.
When the ornate (the aesthetic) is set in place
in the Philadelphia suburbs, it is an expression,
also, of the region's apparitional vision, relation to
a wider world than even material nature; out
into physical space, into the cosmos, against
the restraining force of the earthly. So, in a
roundabout way, I get closer to the individuals
who have planned or charted the buildings
through allowing them (both) to seep into my brain.
Relationships, in recessionary times, abstract
themselves— I stretch towards acceptance, gratitude.

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Words Dance— solipsist

